



# Reflections on my journey towards culture-bound and intercultural education

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## Introduction

This chapter deals with my development as a foreign language teacher and researcher, on the one hand, and my understanding of intercultural (foreign language) education, on the other. I begin by describing my starting position as a foreign language teacher. During my first steps as a teacher and researcher, I understood the inseparable connection between language and its background culture. In connection with my doctoral thesis and the first follow-up study, I realized that foreign language learning involved the perception of foreign and familiar both as a dialogical process with others and, at same time, as a very individual process.

My further research projects led me to use the notion of language education for foreign language teaching. In the increasingly global world, intercultural encounters between people are regular and require the use of different languages. I have chosen to describe the new situation using the word ‘intercultural’. I talk about intercultural education and intercultural foreign language learning or teaching in the same context. This is because I understand that the same principles can be seen both in intercultural foreign language learning and in intercultural or multicultural education. As part of my chronological path, I also discuss authenticity and identity and plurilingualism as significant conceptions of modern foreign language education. Finally, I discuss the main points of my current understanding and propose some central perspectives to foreign language education.

## The first steps towards the culture-bound and intercultural approach

From the beginning of my teaching career, I have been a foreign language teacher. The 1970s was dominated by structuralism in linguistics and behaviourism in the educational sciences. I worked three years as a German teacher in an upper secondary school before my appointment as the lecturer of German didactics at the University of Tampere (in 1977). Three years earlier, teacher education had become part of Finnish universities at the newly established department of teacher education. The situation gave me both the obligation and the possibility, as a rather young teacher, to reflect on my own teaching and to consider what kind of a world view, language conception and language teaching competences new teachers would need in their work.

My considerations of teacher education and views of foreign language learning led me to develop learning materials for the Finnish comprehensive and upper secondary schools in 1979 with a group of

four teachers of German. One of our central ideas was that the learning material in school should be as authentic as possible. Authenticity was thus one of the leading conceptions paving the way to my beginning research work. However, my interpretation of authenticity at the end of the 1970s was narrow compared to my later understanding of it. At that time, authenticity was mostly understood as correct language use and cultural information of the target countries. The second important conception was communicative competence, particularly the oral competence in the use of foreign languages. At that time, however, the teaching of competences for communication was rather minute because of the strong influence of structuralism in linguistics.

To develop new learning materials, I set up a collaborative five-year teaching project at the Department of Teacher Education in the University of Tampere with three other teacher colleagues in German, focusing first on the 8th and 9th grades in comprehensive education. The project was later expanded for a further three years at the upper secondary school level. The comprehensive school learning material called *Komm mit 8–13* was published by the WSOY printing house (1980–1985).

From the beginning of the project, we assumed an aspiration to connect with the living worlds of the 14- to 15-year-old pupils. Through our teacher contacts in German schools, we asked German pupils of the same age to write about their lives, opinions and interests in the themes that we considered the learning material should include. In this way, we obtained rich, authentic material as the basis for the texts and exercises that we developed together. The learning material project was completed in 1985. While it did not produce research papers, it created a solid base for my theoretical thinking and later studies.

## Relationship between language and culture

The connection between language and culture is collective by nature. The fact that people belong to various groups naturally implies that the language used, or the languages used, are culture-bound. For human beings, language is a basic way of existing in the world. It is by means of language that we express ourselves and connect with fellow individuals. By means of language and by using language, we examine and evaluate the world, ask questions that are important to us, tell others about ourselves, set up relationships with others and listen to them and their notions of the world and themselves.

Language is also a means of expressing membership in a variety of collective groups, participation in our ways of living, and seeing the world and human beings as part of it. But simultaneously, we also dissociate ourselves from certain groups, i.e. from people who think and act in a different way. By means of language we also express our non-commitment to a certain set of values and to people who think and act in a certain way. By expressing our commitment and non-commitment, we, in fact, reveal who we are and what we are like (Kaikkonen 2012a).

Language depends deeply on culture, being a product of a particular culture. Languages differ from each other in several respects. Each language has its own sentence structure, sounds and vocabulary. The prevailing culture has developed or defined the way in which a particular language is written. The words of a language provide a great deal of information about their cultural past, but it is still not a matter of course that we are able to comprehend this information. In most cases we do not pay any attention to the cultural origin, or narrative, of the words in our mother tongue.

A language is further connected with *extra-linguistic factors* in a variety of ways, such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, the rituals, symbols and other signs that have been established in practice, as well as the non-linguistic signals that we both send and receive.

Moreover, our language is influenced, for instance, by our notions of time, space and gender. A language is used for communication and interpreted as part of the person's overall behaviour by the participants. Communication invariably includes meanings other than linguistic ones. As human languages are culture-bound, they are linked to the other factors that are present in their respective cultures. (Kaikkonen 1994; 2001; 2004; 2012a.)

The fact that language and culture are so deeply intertwined is very significant for foreign language teaching and learning. This was the point of view that I had already considered as a young language teacher when wondering about the contents of existing learning materials, classroom teaching methods, and the principles of teacher education that resulted in my own classroom behaviour. Understanding the language as being deeply rooted in its background culture led me to teach the foreign language in a culture-oriented way, by sensitising pupils to foreign language culture and foreignness, actively making perceptions of foreign linguistic behaviour and becoming, at the same time, aware of their automatized linguistic and culture-bound behaviours (e.g. Kaikkonen 1997b).

## Becoming a researcher of culture-bound foreign language learning and teaching

In 1986, I received the opportunity to conduct full-time research for half a year's time with funding by the Finnish Ministry of Education and the Academy of Austria. The time at the Teacher Training University in Graz was crucial for my thinking about learning and teaching foreign languages. I was now able to acquaint myself with qualitative research and its possibilities in fieldwork. I also deepened my understanding of experiential learning and teaching in foreign languages (cf. Puchta & Schratz 1984), and of the plurality of the conception of culture. As a result, I was able to outline an action

research experiment to study the learners' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of foreign language and culture learning. The experimental project was conducted in 1989–1990. Ten German language students participated in it, Burkhart Bendel (lecturer) and myself, from the University of Tampere. As a result of this project, I finished my doctoral thesis *Erlebte Landeskunde* (Kaikkonen 1991). It deepened my understanding of authenticity towards the language user's authentic action, producing a change of perspective as a new notion that included a comparison of and reflection on two different language cultures, introducing the conception of an authentic encounter.

I summarised the conclusions of the thesis briefly as follows: A central function of the stay in Germany, besides giving opportunities for observation, contact and information-gathering, was to allow the participating students to test their previous assumptions enabling them to verify or falsify them. An important result was that the teaching experiment and its procedures were able to change the participants' cultural awareness (Kaikkonen 1991, 175). At that time, intercultural foreign language teaching was in search of its forms at least in Central Europe, and thus my doctoral thesis aroused a great amount of interest among foreign language education researchers. As the result of this, I had the opportunity to participate in several international seminars and conferences.

The action research approach provided an excellent way to connect theory with practice. It led to conducting further research with students at the upper secondary school level. Thus an action research study on culture-oriented foreign language teaching was launched in collaboration with Tuula Pantzar and Jari Aarnio, the lecturers in German and French at the Teacher Training School affiliated with the University of Tampere (Kaikkonen 1993; 1995). The project comprised a two-year teaching experiment with 16- to 17-year-old students aimed at producing a curriculum that would take into account the deep connection between language and culture, and thus help the

learners grow out of the shell of their mother tongue and their own culture. The research project was also aimed at developing an active learner role through simulations and mental image training. The project thus included a number of activities with the students of French and German involving site visits or online work. Moreover, there were several classroom encounters with adult native speakers of French and German including a great deal of reflective, collaborative and dialogical action (Kaikkonen 1998b).

The results of the study can be summarised as follows: the action research *Culture and Foreign Language Learning* indicated that a foreign language has to be studied with its cultural background. Moreover, it became clear that foreign language learning as a traditional school subject could help pupils grow towards intercultural understanding and intercultural learning to some extent only. It is obvious that pupils have been guided to consider other people, be pluralistic, and think globally in all school subjects. According to this approach, however, to achieve intercultural learning, the curriculum should be developed in such a way that it also includes all the basic fundamentals of intercultural learning: an individual's own culture, his or her own cultural behaviour, and his or her own language on the one hand, and foreign cultures, strange behaviour, and foreign languages on the other. So, familiarity and foreignness are the experiences the pupils should be exposed to in school continuously. (Kaikkonen 1997a, b.) The research project helped me understand that foreign language learning has to deal with intercultural learning. To be efficient, intercultural learning should not be limited to foreign language education only; it should be part of the entire school curriculum. These demands have been understood well in the latest school curricula in Finland.

## Towards cooperative and networked language and culture education

In 1994, together with Professor Viljo Kohonen, we started a collaborative long-term research and development project together, the OK project. It was an intensive three-year project designed and led by the two of us in collegial collaboration. It was carried out in six schools in Tampere and Nokia with 40 participating teachers and their pupils (see Kohonen in this volume). The project included classes from comprehensive to upper secondary schools. In addition to our shared responsibility, I was in charge of research on *intercultural learning*. The project findings were published in three edited collections of papers written by both the participating schoolteachers and researchers of the Department of Teacher Education. The project also resulted in several studies that were published both nationally and internationally (e. g. Kohonen & Kaikkonen 1996; Kaikkonen 1998a; Kohonen & Kaikkonen 2001). Moreover, members of the project group participated in several European seminars, coordinated by the Council of Europe, and in different international research seminars and conferences. In this way, a large international network was built up for disseminating the findings.

The experiences of the participating teachers and pupils yielded a great deal of new understanding of *dialogical* and *reflective action* and the challenges of encountering foreignness. In addition, the project revealed the importance of a whole-school approach in supporting the learners' intercultural education and understanding of otherness, similarity and difference. Learners clearly progressed towards the global world and intercultural challenges (Kaikkonen 1999). The project also functioned as excellent in-service education for the participating teachers, facilitating them to commit themselves to reflecting on and reporting their classroom experiences for a sufficiently long period of time (Kohonen 1999).



In 1998, I was appointed as the professor of foreign language pedagogy at the University of Jyväskylä, acting in this position for the following 11 years. My collaboration with the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Tampere, particularly with Professor Viljo Kohonen continued seamlessly. In 1999, we established a nation-wide series of the so-called VikiPeda conferences in foreign language education, aimed at supporting the pedagogical research at the departments of teacher education in Finnish universities, and disseminating the findings to language teachers nationally. These conferences took place biannually at each university and were coordinated by us and organised by the local university researchers. Through the funding by the Ministry of Education, it was possible to invite internationally distinguished researchers of foreign language education to all of these conferences<sup>1</sup>.

My research orientation as a professor at the University of Jyväskylä continued in the direction that I had assumed at the Department of Teacher Education in Tampere. My basic theoretical assumptions matured in the collegial work with active researchers in Jyväskylä and in the fruitful collaboration with different universities and research centres, especially with colleagues at the universities in Tampere, Turku and Oulu. While in Jyväskylä, and during my visiting researcher year at the Pedagogical University of Heidelberg, it became clear to me that my conception of authenticity had to be widened beyond language and cultural authenticity. This led me to the realisation that authenticity is deeply connected with experience and the meaning given to it. Next, I discuss my expanding understanding of authenticity in some more detail.

*Authenticity* means something genuine that originates from the person himself or herself, as indicated by its Greek root word (authentēs = originator, maker). The person who initiates something

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<sup>1</sup> The conferences were held in Jyväskylä (1999 and 2013), Tampere (2001), Oulu 2003, Turku (2005), Helsinki (2007), Joensuu (2009) and Vaasa (2011). The conference papers were published by the local university, from the second volume onwards in English and/or German (see also Kohonen in this volume).

new is a maker or originator of the new idea or thing. Thus, in foreign language learning, authenticity refers to the significance of learning situations and the learning process. In this sense, authenticity is directly connected to experiences of foreign language and its communicative use in a community of speakers. The learner is thus the person who acts, experiences, makes things happen. Philosophically expressed, the pupil is the subject of his or her own learning (Jaatinen 2001; Lehtovaara 2001). Since authenticity in foreign language learning is connected to several factors, it should not be reduced to mean just one issue, such as the authenticity of foreign language use or culture.

I wish to argue that authenticity and experience are closely connected (see van Lier 1996). Further, the notions of perception and reflection seem to be closely connected to them, the latter as a tool helping the learner critically explain his or her experience, being open to ambiguity in meanings. As a result of this process the learner is able to change his or her understanding. Authentic foreign language teaching should thus include and provide authentic experiences of foreign language use and of the target culture, and give learners opportunities to test their observations and interpretations in as real situations and in as authentic ways as possible. Moreover, foreign language teaching should make it possible for learners to change or strengthen their received knowledge. They should also be able to ask whether their observations correspond to the reality and whether their hypotheses of language use are right, i. e. current and acceptable in foreign language use in intercultural contexts. Teachers of foreign languages are well placed in this complex process of negotiating meanings and making sense of interaction. (Kaikkonen 2000; Kaikkonen 2002.)

The above reasoning led me to further reflect on the teachers' pedagogical action in foreign language teaching. I analysed it through three models: the pedagogy of information, the pedagogy of encounter and the pedagogy of conflict (cf. Nieke 2000). Eva Larzén has added to them the pedagogy of preparation in her doctoral thesis (Larzén 2005).

The *pedagogy of information* refers to teaching that aims at giving learners information and facts. In language teaching this means, among other things, teaching words, idioms, phrases, grammar, pronunciation and orthography, and correcting the learners' mistakes. In culture and Landeskunde teaching this is a matter of teaching geographical or society-based facts and culture-related behaviours. The *pedagogy of encounter*, according to its name, is about encounters with foreign cultures and their members – both face-to-face and, for example, through electronic communication and online encounters. Learning is intercultural and dialogical, which means receiving experiences in authentic situations, and reflecting on them alone or in collaboration with others. The *pedagogy of conflict* is always based on encounters, either real or simulated. Encounter may often lead to smaller or bigger conflicts. We should not be afraid of them or avoid them because they provide real opportunities for intercultural learning. Conflicts can also be simulated in the classroom and their solutions can be discussed cooperatively (Donath & Volkmer 2000; Kaikkonen 2005b; 2007). Larzén (2005, 119) defines the *pedagogy of preparation* as follows: "The pedagogy of preparation concept is used about working methods aimed at preparing the students for acting appropriately in future intercultural situations." According to her, most teachers in her study referred to this approach.

Rather than language *teaching*, modern language pedagogy prefers to use the concept of language *education* (see Kohonen in this volume). The reason for the change of the concept may be the fact that the emphasis has shifted to the learner as an individual, to his or her languages and culture(s). The world and all of its regions are multicultural. Globalisation has increased people's worldwide mobility, which is further promoted by the nearly unlimited amount of information on the Internet and in other media, and by encounters and exchanges of experiences in the social media. Different cultures and individuals are present all the time and in most living areas. The second reason for preferring language education to language teaching

relates to the notion of learners' ownership for their learning. Kohonen (2001) says that there is a need to develop foreign language teaching towards the notion of *learner education*. He points out that the term 'education' is more appropriate here than 'training' because it implies a holistic goal orientation to learning that emphasises educational values.

Language education clearly includes the notion that human beings are *plurilingual* (i. e. polyglot, individually multicultural) in different ways. They are surrounded by different cultural phenomena, they encounter otherness and foreignness in authentic situations and as authentic actors, and they are forced to clarify ambiguous experiences to themselves and often to others also. They come across conflicts and have to solve problems arising from these. This has an influence on their self-conceptions and identities. This fact can also be seen in the curricula of schools and other learning institutions, and thus the integration of subjects is no more a theoretical matter. Every school subject can enhance the learning of language and culture. Consequently, a plurilingual and pluricultural individual is a common cross-curricular goal, in which the learners' different languages with their cultural features are considered (e. g. Kaikkonen 2012a, b).

## Identity, plurilingualism and intercultural learning and education

As part of recent societal developments, our environments have become multicultural, involving many kinds of connections between individuals, which are related to both language and its background culture. Due to increased mobility and various encounters of foreignness and otherness, people now have a variety of possibilities to make choices concerning their learning. These considerations have led me to a detailed analysis of *identity* and *plurilingualism*. I discuss

both of them because I think they are essential for intercultural education and learning. They are conceptions that describe the individual's narrative character and are thus related to how the individual imagines him- or herself, and how people consider themselves in relation to the world, their environments and other people. Both conceptions are also connected with what types of choices they make or perceive as being possible to them.

This kind of thinking arises from my own and other researchers' studies, and also from a number of doctoral theses that I supervised at the universities of Jyväskylä and Tampere (Karjala 2003; Taajamo 2005; Rasinen 2006; Kara 2007; Nyman 2009; Ruohotie-Lyhty 2011; Valtaranta 2013; Raunio 2013). Similarly, significant to my thinking was the research and development work of the European Language Portfolio conducted in Finland in the 1990s within the OK project (e.g. Kohonen 1994; Lehtomäki 1997; Kolu 1999; Pajukanta 1999; Kohonen & Pajukanta 2000; 2003; Kohonen 2005; Hildén & Salo 2011). The European Language Portfolio project (ELP) culminated in the decision of the Finnish National Board of Education (nowadays: The Finnish National Agency for Education) to develop a Finnish version of the ELP for the Finnish comprehensive school. This assignment was completed in the KISA project at the University of Tampere (2010–12, under the co-leadership of Viljo Kohonen and Pauli Kaikkonen), resulting in the design of a Finnish ELP website <http://kielisalkku.edu.fi> by the project group (2014) under the auspice of the Finnish National Agency for Education. (see Kohonen in this volume).

The conception of *identity* is associated with belonging to a group (cf. Sen 2006), and there are different types of identities. An interesting question is how solid and genuine these groups actually are. An individual's identity is essentially connected to dependence on reference communities: family, relatives and other immediate communities, such as tribe, country and nation. Children join these groups, not by choice, however, and they grow up being influenced

and even moulded by them. When a person grows up, he or she can rework his or her cultural and linguistic identity in many ways, for example, trying to assimilate influences other than those of the source culture. For example, life in a foreign culture inevitably creates new features in the individual. He or she notes that people behave in different ways than he or she has done in his or her familiar environment; and that people value different things from what he or she is used to. Living a long time in a foreign culture makes an earlier unfamiliar behaviour seem as natural and familiar as the behaviour in his or her starting culture.

Likewise, people can expand their repertoire and choice of languages so that they lead various aspects of their lives using different languages. In this way they can become pluricultural and plurilingual individuals for whom different cultures are natural, and various languages are there to serve various purposes (cf. Lüdi 2003; see also van Lier 2012). A foreign language or even several foreign languages then become part of an individual's identity. (Kaikkonen 2005a, c.) Therefore, identity is twofold in nature: it contains traces of both dependence and freedom. Due to being born and having grown up in a society (family, tribe, nation etc.), individuals are so deeply influenced by it that they can hardly free themselves from its influence totally. An excellent example is one's native language. But in youth and adulthood, individuals can dissociate from many former identity features if they see it necessary. In that way, identity can be described as being twofold in nature (Kaikkonen 2004).

The later stages of the modern age – the so-called post-modern age – have transformed the identity of Westerners possibly more than any other people. Processes initiated by the modern age are the foundation to problems associated with relating to a collective identity (i. e. the identity given by a certain institution or community, a nation or country, for example). Since the modern age, people have suffered from a sense of rootlessness, separateness, a sense of not belonging to “the great order of existence”, where everything and everyone had

their own place and a clear function. The modern, post-traditional way of life has thus been characterised by a diversity of perspectives and horizons. The well-educated human being needs an ability to put them in perspective, to challenge them, and to break free of traditional values and community bonds. (Rosa 1998; Kaikkonen 2005c.)

Our global world and our present time have deliberately started to emphasise *plurilingualism* as an important factor in interaction between people speaking different languages, and in efforts to enhance mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. On the one hand, plurilingualism has become a central conception owing to people's mobility. On the other hand, plurilingualism stems from the global working life and economy as well as the unification that has been taking place. Highly typical of modern plurilingualism is that in most cases it is bilingualism that constitutes an individual's plurilingualism. The global world needs a common language, and the English language has occupied the dominant position. However, there are also several other regional lingua francas, such as Spanish, French, Russian and, increasingly, Chinese. (Kaikkonen 2012a.)

One of the aims in language education is the intercultural learning of a foreign language. In my opinion, intercultural foreign language teaching does not differ practically at all from general intercultural education: intercultural education towards multiculturalism (as a nation- and country-wide conception) or pluriculturalism (as an individual conception), internationalism, respect, an understanding of diversity, tolerance for ambiguity, empathy, etc. All of these notions keep appearing in relevant research literature, school curricula and people's everyday talk (Bausinger 1999; Bredella & Delanoy 1999; Kaikkonen 2012a).

In the background of intercultural education, there are two types of principles: on the one hand, the common *principle of human rights*, which is guided by the notion that all human beings are equal and must be treated in the same way. All human beings are equally valuable and have equal rights independent of age, origin or gender.

On the other hand, there is the *principle of difference*, in which the notions of authenticity are recognised. In according to this principle, different characteristics, needs and abilities vary from individual to individual and from one group to another. The principles of equality and difference are realised in tension with each other: the principle of equality calls for equal treatment of all people, while the principle of difference calls for the perception of differences between individuals and groups. Intercultural education and learning is carried out in this tension and exists at the demarcation line between the two conflicting principles.

## Conclusion: discussion and theses of foreign language education

Teaching and learning foreign languages takes place as interplay between own and foreign. Foreign language learners have their native language(s) and culture(s) in the background. When learning a new language, they also encounter a new (language) culture. The task of teaching is to guide learners to grow beyond the borders set by their own culture(s) and native languages(s). This requires (1) sensitisation to diversity, (2) ability to make conscious observations about the native and foreign language, behaviour and environment, and (3) readiness to seek and gather information on linguistic and cultural standards in both cultures (Kaikkonen 2001). Foreign language education thus targets an active language learner with socially responsible learner autonomy (e. g. Kohonen 2012).

Modern language education also aims at producing plurilingual and pluricultural language users. This is a logical aim in the current multilingual and multicultural world. The premises can be manifold: one can be plurilingual because of one's family or immigration, or if one has lived in a foreign language culture, or wants to be able to use different languages in different situations in life. Due to the



very essence of plurilingualism, language educators must take into consideration the learner's different languages: the native language as the language of personal emotions and as the first tool for interpreting the surrounding world, and any other languages in early childhood, as well as the foreign languages chosen by the learner. At the same time, the learner's language identity needs to be considered and developed.

An important principle in language education is also seeing the learner as a person and an active language user from the very beginning, rather than seeing him or her as a recipient of information who is expected to draw that information from the treasury of knowledge after school in real life-situations (cf. Ruohotie-Lyhty et al. 2008). What is extremely important is that learners must be able to experience from the beginning that they can use the new language to do something that is real and meaningful to them, irrespective of the fact that their language usage can at first be deficient and scanty. (Kaikkonen 2012a.)

In language education, one of the aims is intercultural learning, which requires giving the relevant grounds for a description of what exactly interculturalism implies from the various points of view. Intercultural knowledge is not only knowledge that is known to be true. Due to its nature that relates to otherness and foreignness, it is always negotiable knowledge and therefore requires dialogical and authentic learning processes. According to its basic meaning in Greek, *dialogue* means that those engaged in it enter into a kind of intermediate space (dia=through, in between) in which their knowledge, understanding and concepts of the world (logos) are raised for joint contemplation (Kaikkonen 2005b).

The teacher plays a crucial role in introducing foreign language learners to intercultural encounters (cf. Jaatinen 2014). Intercultural learning requires an initiation of several experiential processes. Not merely cognitive, these processes also include as essential elements the pupils' affective, emotional and social behaviour and learning (cf.

Nyman & Kaikkonen 2013). Thus it would be justified to talk about holistic learning and guidance towards it. That means learning to live in a multilinguistic and multicultural world, where encounters with diversity and foreignness are part of everyday life. Thus it seems rather odd that teachers should be able to assess their students' intercultural experience and learning just by means of tests (cf. Byram 2009). What is called metacognitive learning is also an essential part of these processes. In the final analysis, we are concerned with enhancing a process whereby pupils become full members of society and learn to live in the international global world. It is thus a central task of education to enable an individual to become the type of person that is required in the life of today's world and tomorrow.

To sum up, I propose a number of theses for modern foreign language education based on the research findings and thoughts discussed above. As I see it, foreign language education emphasizes the following human, linguistic and pedagogical aspects:

## **Theses of foreign language education**

- Due to their nature, human beings are holistic actors, i. e. thinking, feeling, knowing and acting persons in contact with other people. The goal of schooling is to educate whole persons, human beings, who trust in their experience (Jaatinen 2001; cf. also Jaatinen 2007; Kohonen in this volume).
- Language is an essential part of human identity. Languages other than the native language can also have an important role in the development of the learners' identity (Kaikkonen 2007; Kaikkonen 2009a). Human beings are plurilingual in different ways (Lüdi 2003).
- Language functions above all as a medium of speech, whereby human interaction is very versatile, and non-verbal communication plays a substantial role in it (e.g. Kaikkonen 2001).
- Foreign language education involves cooperation between language, culture and identity. All of these are equally important and influence each other. (Hu 2003; Kaikkonen 2010.)
- Language is in a natural and obligatory contact with its cultural background. When we speak a foreign language, the culture of the native language has an influence on it through interference. Consequently, foreign language education does not propose the native language competence as its goal, but an intercultural communicative competence (Kaikkonen 2012a, b).
- Learning a foreign language is meaningful in authentic situations. This means that learners are creators and co-organisers of their learning and linguistic action (e. g. Kaikkonen 2002).
- Experiences and coming to terms with their possible conflicts are useful and educational in foreign language learning. A significant intercultural foreign language learning process is dialogical. It is based on the respect for each other, on an authentic stance and equal rights of participation for all persons involved (Kaikkonen 2007; 2009b).

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